

Language Oppression and Women

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Introduction

There are memories of a life filled with male/female stereotyping; I was born at the end of the nineteen sixties and living as a curious teen in the seventies meant confronting attitudes and behaviors about the proper role of girls/women in society. Gender roles are socially determined; in fact, I remember grade school teachers' admonishments for "boy talk"-- speaking "aggressively" and "interruptions" to control the conversation. Parental corrections to speak "girl-talk" remain today and my grandmother's words of wisdom resonate: "The best way to learn is to master the speech." Trying to hold together a marriage and raise two daughters, generated interest in male/female relationships and conversational styles. Dr. John Gray (2002) has researched men/women relationships and revelations in the book, *Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus*, can lead to a happy togetherness through understandings the existence of gender-specific oral communication (speech). Moreover, working in high-powered jobs such as policy consultant at the California State Legislature and the Governor's Office as well as lobbyist and education program consultant to State Superintendent of Public Instruction, crystallized an interest in gender roles and language use. You see, I've experienced bias at work because *I am woman*; even have female friends share stories of gender inequality and the language use that is derogatory and oppressive—"hey babe," "what-up doll," "hey babe, have paper on my desk....," "that b----- must be crazy," or, "you are nothing, woman." After taking the *Sociology of Language* course, my interest in language oppression and effect on women intensified; of particular interests is language use based on cultural traditions to maintain social,

economic and political inequality of women (and girls). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act does prohibit gender discrimination; and, there are laws against sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace. An article recently published in the *Wall Street Journal* (2010), explains that there's "new cognitive research" about language influence on the way people view the world (Boroditsky, 2010). As eloquently stated by Desai, et al. (1982):

"The deep foundations of the inequality of the sexes are built in the minds of men and women through a socialization process which continues to be extremely powerful. Right from their earliest years, boys and girls are brought up to know that they are different from each other and this differentiation is strengthened in every way possible- through language forms, modes of behaviour, of labour etc The only institution which can counteract the effect of this process is the educational system. If education is to promote equality for women, it must make a deliberate, planned and sustained effort so that the new value of equality of the sexes, can replace the traditional value system of inequality. The educational system today has not even attempted to undertake this responsibility. . . ." (p. 2)

My grandmother couldn't imagine that language use, or mastery, results in more than acquiring a formal education, but also oral and written linguistic expressions mediate the interactions of humans in the social world. Social structures affect gender roles and reinforce linguistic relationships so that language which denigrates women is assimilated into the male history and, says Dale Spender (1980), the "man-made language" becomes a source of beliefs and values that may render women powerless, unequal and oppressed (Spender, 1980; Koonce, 1997; Jabr, 2008). As conceived by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, oppression is denial of equality and concerning education of women in the 18th century, oppression is denial of equal freedoms" (Cudd, 2006, p. 8). Women know the existence of male superiority which is granted and unchallenged in some cultures; for example, Lee's research in 1998 reveals Chinese naming practices eliminate the "generation name" for females which is

dictated by social status and male dominance (Blogs, 2004) and the reality of linguistic violence discussed by O'Toole and Schiffman (1997) which reveals an association between condemnatory violent terms and abusive behavior toward women. Even Deborah Cameron's research indicates that "sexist language" teaches women to be "second-class citizens" (1985, p. 41). Women inferiority is related to the "potent" sexism in language: "nag," "b----," "whoer," "mamie," "my woman," "my slave." Oppression of women and the use of language are global issues that involve a plurality of cultures, nation-states, ideologies and moral traditions that warrant an investigation (even intervention) of practices under *Shria law* such as "43-year old Iranian woman to be stoned death for alleged adultery" (Batty, 2010, para. 1) and Kenyan women's fear of "sexual violence" at public restrooms more than the risk to their health from diseases as cholera and dysentery from improper sanitation disposal (Clarke, 2010). There is much to learn about oppressive language and language use to reinforce socio-cultural traditions that maintain (or lead to) inequality of women; in particular research findings of postmodern era scholars from linguistics (sociolinguistics), feminism, sociology, psychology, education, politics and public administration as well as highlighted theories accessible in the interdisciplinary works of feminists linguists, women studies scholars and women public administration (institutional and contingency theories) theorists. This paper explores knowledge about language use in society, with a myopic view to understand the social function of language oppression and gender. The literature review was guided by the following: Why interests in language oppression of women? What can we learn from popular theories as Radical Feminism and Marxism about the endurance

of language oppression? What politics-administration forms may perpetuate language oppression? How can we benefit from education? Why are females (women and girls) research subjects regarding language and oppression? What are the popular research methods used by linguists interested in language oppression and gender issues? The context of the literature review reports very little use of the meta-analysis research method by popular linguists; overwhelming use of ethnography provides the research-based guidance to scholars and policy makers. Research findings help students of sociolinguistics understand the structural properties of language and function in a society. Investigating the effects of language oppression and gender, the practice is to differentiate the terms *gender* and *sex* in research (Wardhaugh, 2009; Fasold, 1990). Moreover, distinguishing the research terms *language oppression* and *oppressive language* are valid to test the research hypothesis. The research suggests that differentiation of the aspects of language (lexical, grammar, phonological) are gender-specific and empirical evidence exists about the effectiveness of “how to” study linguistic oppression. The goal is to describe and explore the conceptual framework for linguistic oppression of women (and, in few studies, female girls/teens) in hopes of offering additional information to education professionals. Perhaps, for a master field project, the learning experiences of women, could be accessed by questionnaire to gain knowledge about awareness of language oppression (media exploitations of women, narratives by women) and effects on their view of their roles in social world. The Structural Contingency theory of public administration could be applied to examine this topic for a master’s thesis project. Technologies can support research that can add to learning more about language oppression and women in the 21st century so that educational systems can offer effective solutions.

Literature Review

Why the interests in language and gender? The linguistic differences have been studied by Hellinger and Bubmann (2001), *Gender across Languages*, and findings indicate that phonological differences in male/female speech dates back to ancient times. Moreover, the journey between theory and practice and language use has been fraught with discussions and literature reviews that benefit from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship—feminism and linguistics interpret gender discrimination in terms of an established “patriarchal” and “sexist” social structure whereby language use maintains the status quo (Hellinger, 2001; McAll, 1992) .

Linguistic literature provides information from research about feminized language in many industrialized societies—i.e. in Japanese women use sentence-final particle *ne* or *wa* (Coates, 1990, p. 339). Janet Holmes (1998), *Complimenting-A Positive Politeness Strategy*, has compelling research that suggests use of “compliments, greetings or expressions of gratitude” differ between men and women (Coates, 1990, p. 100). A compliment, or explicitly saying nice words about a person, has to do with the speaker. It’s interesting to note that some men think that they are complimenting, but are offending: “Hey baby/honey, what’s your name?” The literature concerning the structural analysis of language use, specifically, the oppression of language on women is fascinating research and more knowledge can be used to threaten the “system-maintenance” essential to the *privilege* members of the superior male gender group (or class, ethnicity) (McAll, 1992, pp. 204-205).

Although some consider prostitution one of the oldest female-dominated professions, feminists and women's studies scholars state that "the right to work" should be regarded as "equal with men in the eyes of the law" and structural conditions as "injustice" and "oppression" are few reasons for women prevalence in the profession (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 1). David Graddol and Joan Swann (1989), *Gender Voices*, discuss the "determinist poststructuralist" view of female struggle and oppression which language helps to construct in terms of the sexual inequities in society; nevertheless, the idea that language determines thought and influences discrimination against women is debated (pp. 9, 157-8; O'Toole, 1997, p. 468). The language oppression and gender nexus in Poststructuralist Theory seems relevant because of the focus on language in context and sociolinguistics insist that we examine the linguistic meanings of words, or codes, of the speech event, or, conversational interactions of speakers/listeners reveal how people view the world. But, linguistic determinism is rejected by some linguists because individual speakers are exposed to ideological effects of the speech communication which is subjective and based on the articulation of the words than the abstractions of words (Graddol, 1989; Cameron, 1985).

Clarifying Meanings: Gender, Sex and Language

The notion of discourses and the social use of language is the study of sociolinguistics, the sub-field known as language and gender, in which gender-specific, or male/female talk, is the main topic in the area (Coates, 2010; Wardhaugh, 2010). Contemporary research includes

literature reviews of information and methodologies about language use to perpetuate the oppression of women in some societies as well as issues of sexism and occupational gender-equality related to variations in speech. The social roles of males/females and language use has been astronomical, and spurred by feminist studies as an important force in social change. Feminists are interested in the variations of language (codes, code switching, conversational interactions) and reform along politics-administration, social, cultural and lingual lines (Hellinger, 2001; Madsen, 2000; Cameron, 1985). Research findings are “extraordinarily productive” in examining the Whorfian Hypothesis that the language of men and women is structured differently (Coates, 1998, p. 5; Wardhaugh, 2010; 333). Research on language and gender investigates the sexism in language; linguists consider *gender* a socially constructed category which classifies males and females; and sex refers to the biological determination (Wardhaugh, 2010, pp. 333-334). Literature on the biological and anatomical differences between men/women and effects on language include topics as the larynx which explain the acoustical sounds made by males/females which are physiologically determined and speech. Phonological differences in speech indicate males have a palatalized dental stop of females have a palatalized velar stop (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 336); and, Cameron (1997) and Kulick (2003) emphasize the XY and XX chromosomes that also differentiate male and female sexes important for building a linguistic framework to examine sexuality, rather than gender-specific language. In addition to physiology and anatomy, and genetics, are the important neurological differences between male and female sexes; the corpus callosum (part of the brain) is significantly larger in women allowing them greater spatial accuracy and stronger skills in empathy than men (Allen, et al., 1991).

As regards grammar and language, research indicates that nouns and pronouns are used to classify men and women. For instance, the “lexical” classification includes the terms sex, gender as well as pronouns, he/she, and nouns such as father/mother, son/daughter, uncle/ aunt; all make reference to a specific gender. However, using grammar to mark gender is neither new, nor confined to English. Borditsky (2010), in the Wall Street Journal article says languages “shape the way we think” and has since the time of “Charlemagne [who] proclaimed that ‘to have a second language is to have a second soul.’ But the idea went out of favor with scientists when Noam Chomsky's theories of language gained popularity in the 1960s and '70s. Dr. Chomsky proposed that there is a universal grammar for all human languages—essentially, that languages don't really differ from one another in significant ways.... it made no sense to ask whether linguistic differences led to differences in thinking” (para 5). Gender-specific grammar and semantic rules exists in the English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, African languages such as Swahili, and among the Asian (Chinese, Japanese) languages, which emphasize the male/female forms (Hellinger and Bubman, 2001, p. 105). English is a global language with some 341 million people as native or second language speakers. Gender relates to masculine and feminine; and, some nouns are gender-neutral as neighbor, engineer, politician, and spouse. What hasn't changed over time is the prolific use of “he/she” pronouns and popular nouns as father/mother, and widow/widower to represent gender in language; moreover, the sociolinguists (provide empirical evidence of language variation and social influences, rendering the Chomsky view of language proficiency as only a partial explanation to understand language influence on thinking Gumperz, 1982; Wardhaugh, 2010).

The Socio-Cultural Language

Is language dynamic? Sociolinguistic research into the socio-cultural influence on language and gender-differentiated dialects is quite interesting. The social or anthropological linguists provide research on the issues of language use that is socio-culturally determined. The Yanyuwa are a tribe of 150 indigenous people that speak an Australian aboriginal language which has gender markings—children are raised to speak women dialect, and boys must shift into manhood by perfecting the “men-talk” (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 339-340). Linguistic literature indicates that in the lesser Antilles and West Indies, gender differences exist and are supported by language, “because men and women teach boy and girl children different language (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 336). Even Labov’s studies in New York and Philadelphia indicate differences in adult speech of men and women, which supports claims about language support of gender roles. In the English language, the use of so-called male vocabulary has been clarified by researchers interested in the etymology of words that are found in dictionaries. Word distinctions include pronouns (he/she), and adjectives/adverbs (*ly* endings) such as “babe/baby,” “honey/cutie,” “widow/widower,” “hunk (for a man),” “actor/actress,” and “master/mistress;” or, oppressive words as the 4-letter kind. Additionally, research refutes notions that women’s speech is illogical, idle gossip (p. 336). Research on women speakers of English indicates that in certain jobs (positions of power); women are advised to use “men speech” –deeper voice, speak more monotonously and use “men’s vocabulary.” Dr. Tannen’s (2009) research has established boy/girl differences in language which is influenced by social networking and related to identity. The field of language and identity is intriguing; however, due to the brevity of this paper, little attention is

given to the topic. Simply, the topic of boy/girl speech variations is of interest to educators because of the impact on identity; children learn at an early age and in school and social networks gender-specific speech and gender roles (Eva Van de gear, 2009). Renowned radical feminist theorists and scholar, Dr. Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), states that words can be deceptive, paralyzing and oppressive and highlights the patriarchal society and social institutions that maintain women inequality. In the American feminist thinking, language use and oppression are found in radical feminism research with emphasis on the “femininity;” scholars investigate reasons women are “eternally self-sacrificing,” struggling with their own image and experience the “alienation from language” (Spender, 2000, p.6; Daly, 1978; Cameron, 1985).

Radical Feminist Theory offers a framework to understand the “silence” of women and forms linguistic oppression as well as women empowerment (Madsen, 2000; Dalrymple, 2006). For instance, the following lines from a poem aim to use words against oppression and to empower women:

Why do they speak to me this way?
What happened to my right to have my say?
Why do they speak to me this way?
What happened to my right to protection?
Why do they reject and push me away?
What happened to my opinion and viewpoints?
Why do they assess me in this way?
What happened to my freedom I must say? (Chris Bennett, 1994, in *Anti-
Oppressive Practice*, Dalrymple, 2006, p. 27).

Radical Theory, Marxist Theory and Cultural Theory from feminist writings explicitly link theory and practice, at least, acknowledge the need to have a theoretical framework to help examine the topic of language oppression and gender and implications for practice. Structural Contingency theory of public administration offers insight into the public institutions or organizational arrangements that maintain women in unequal status and association to use of “man-made” language use (Spender, 1984; Tannen, 1994; Graddol & Swann, 1989). As previously stated, radical feminist theories tend to consider patriarchy and socio-cultural constructs which challenge women equality and elicit the ideas of liberal reform and cultural change that is used in professions as social work, education and group therapy (Dalrymple, 2006, pp. 28-29). For example, women feeling social injustice and inequality like to feel “disempowered” and “marginalized” and the language use reflects this reality; the speech interactions are in the context of health and social service organizations, education facilities and families where the concept of power and oppression are at work. Beliefs women have of “disempowerment”-- the Kenyan women afraid of sexual violence at the public restrooms and risk health problems, or the Iranian law that “increases victims,” women suffering from stoning (article in *New York Times*, 7/14/2010)—are socially constructed values that promote oppression and inequality and control is by nation-states (governments) (Dalrymple, 2006, p. 84; Cameron, 1985, pp. 144-145; Asgharzadeh, 2007, p. 26). Deborah Madsen (2000), *Feminist Theory and Literacy Practice*, provides the theory-practice connection to satisfy interests regarding the ethical and professional realities of women relative to language oppression and social interactions that are critically analyze in linguistic research.

Marxism, Language and Gender

Feminist theory draws from the works of Karl Marx, or Marxist feminism, to understand the socio-economic reality of women inequality and oppression (Madsen, 2007; Cudd, 2006). Women are in a unique position that involves language use and gender roles at home, and in public institutions (at work). Traditions of “domination” and oppression are steeped in socio-economic and cultural practices that are gleaned from research writings regarding “economic exploitation” of argued by Hume: the laborious poor pay a considerable part of the taxes...an inequality and oppression...”(Cudd, 2006, pp. 6-7). The essence of Marxism is that the workers (proletariat, inferior) are oppressed and treated unequally by the bourgeoisie (wealthy, superior); and feminist theory extends the concept to the social construction of women in the male-dominated society and link these to conceptualizations of oppression and inequality. Mills, *The Subjection of Women*, states that females (women/girls) are oppressed by males, (Cudd, 2006, p. 9-10); and, Marx’s conceptual change in the 19th century includes a deeper understanding of oppression as fundamentally caused by economics and effects on women workers (Cudd, 2006, pp. 9-10; Madsen, 2000). In modern times, the oppressor still embodies the male superior, and the socio-economic system is “patriarchy a cultural (ideological) system that privileges men and all things masculine and a political system that places power in the hands of men and thus serves male interests at the expense of women” (Madsen, 2000, p. 1). Interestingly, sociolinguistics focus is on the socio-cultural hierarchy and the use of oppressive language (Madsen, 2000, p. 22; Cameron, 1985). Gender politics (sex and politics) is a huge topic and beyond the scope of this paper, however, Madsen (2000), *Language and Linguistics and Sex Differences* (chapter 3), is a

sound source to explore the female model of language. A narrower focus of gender economics indicates women must confront the socio-political and economic systems to earn a living is an intellectual path worth discussing.

Politics, Administration and Language

What politico-administrative forms may perpetuate language oppression? Cudd (2006), argues that Marx's was wrong about future social constructions that would become less oppressive to the working class women; in fact, values that situate women in the current "Anglo-American tradition" and politico-economic conditions are "fundamental to oppression" and social injustice (see chapter 2). Socio-political conditions become a part of a women's "psychic life" and oppression at work and home are "reiterations of subjection" or "alienation" (Oliver, 2004, pp. 7-8). There's active learning about how to reduce gender stereotypes that are popular on television, and at *Gender Ads.Com*, are prolific clothing advertisements for *Victoria Secrets and Calvin Klien* and, gender-vocabulary used in daily to demonstrate the masculinity or femininity of male/females. Social networks share weblinks to advertisements and narratives of the exploitations of women such as the shoe ad by *Nike* of a young woman half naked, saying "My butt is big and round..." (see <http://www.fithiphealthy.com/fithiphealthy/2010/07/nike-for-women.html>). Wardhaugh (2010) acknowledges there's a societal determination of gender-roles and "appropriate" speech for men and women (p. 334). Linguists didn't search primarily for the psycho-social, politics (related to power) and economic connections of language variations and use in social settings; the potency of this association is found in feminist theories; although,

contributions to research on the topic of language variation and social norms relative to work originate with Labov's classic *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (Labov, 1966)" (Fasold, 1990, p. 223). The politics of changing gender roles is grappling with women in non-traditional public (not at home) occupations. The ideas of gender-variations in language at work indicate that stereotypes can quickly become the social norm and are difficult to change; e.g., in modern society men have decided to stay at home and care for children, should they be called *househusbands*? Xavier Ramos ((1998), conducted research on work roles and gender in the United Kingdom (UK), and found that the allocation of tasks are changing—men accepting more responsibility at home with the children, even the distribution of house chores are more balanced (p. 267). Traditional gender roles are changing to match contemporary social values and practices and there's new language as "the best man" or "new man" for men adopting a greater role in childrearing. Lakoff's research, *Language and Women's Place*, indicates stereotypes at work such as "women use more approval-seeking constructions.... 'that'll be all right, wasn't it?' ...indicates uncertainty" (Madsen, 2000, p. 33). In general, linguists such as Gumperz (the Father of sociolinguistics), recognize the hierarchy of language variations and suggests linguistics can explain power relations; women behave like men to "gain power" and use power speech (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 337). Coates (1998), says that gender and power is more than a "theoretical debate;" women's language can render them powerless; therefore, it's important to learn about communication.

For example, in the US, women entering the public domains and accepting positions that were traditionally male-dominated: "Men are firmly placed in and defined by public world of

business, commerce and politics” (Coates, 1998, p. 296). Women must confront existing speech patterns as well. In linguistic terms, women are expected to adopt forms of speech that is adversarial, information-based and “male-talk” (Coates, 1998, p. 297). Consider the research on Pittsburgh police officers by Bonnie McElhinny (1998), who found implicit evidence of gender predominance in the workplace (Coates, 1998, p. 309).

Even as the political participation and legal reforms led to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1972 Equal Opportunity Act, and policies prohibiting sexual harassment in workplaces, language change is slow, specifically in places that are traditionally all-male, which suggests that evolutions in language use is also slow. Coates (1998) studies indicate the politico-administrative institutions are making progress to improve unequal conditions at work (businesses, academe, government); still, change is slow. For instance, females in policing are called “police officer,” sometimes addressed as “sir” and in their work they must not display emotion: “They must act tough, suspicious, and distant” (Coates, 1998, p. 311). One female officer states: “My occupational persona is a mask. I should just be able to be me—I shouldn’t have to be everybody else,” and, she must learn not to smile (Coates, 1998, p. 313). Research of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and University of Pittsburgh Women Studies Programs, indicates that women have behaviors that are different from men, which is indicative of the differences in physiology and neurology—women are emotional and tend towards collaboration and team building (Wardhaugh, 2010; Coates, 1998; Allen, et al., 2007, Scott, 1988). Cameron (1985) argues that women also have “women’s style” of speaking which is

the study of the Feminist Folklinguistics; they even offer workshops in six areas:

- Disfluency (helping women to communicate in male language)
- Unfinished sentences.
- Speech not ordered according to the norms of logic
- Statements couched as approval-seeking.
- Using co-operative strategies in conversation, whereas men use competitive strategies
- Speaking less than men in mixed groups. (p. 35)

Feminist theory regarding language oppression and gender realities faced by women in occupational categories illuminates the socio-political and cultural constructions that exist. The sophistication of the theories liberalism feminisms, Radical, Marxist feminism pay attention to language variations giving rise to manmade language and women's speech which may account for the oppression, or certainly the "disempowerment" experienced by some women. Literature does indicate a role of politics and administrative organizations influence on language use, power and oppression of women. Linguistic researchers have found a correlation between women ethnicity/race and language use at work and social networks. Nichols (1976), repeated Fischer's 1958 ethnographic study of boys and girls use of "ing/in" participle endings, which revealed that in "semi-rural New England village girls consistently used more standard-prestige (ing) ending than boys;" and Labov (1966), later found this was true of New York adults' speakers. Studies since the sixties recognized that black men and women in the rural south were found to have linguistic differences; and, the women used more standard participles (ing) than men (Coates, 1998, p. 56). Trudgill elaborates on the point of linguistic differences between men and women in general, as women want to achieve status in Western societies more on the bases of how they look and sound (Coates, 1998, p. 56). Nichols' (1976) research findings regarding the speech of

black women in the rural south indicate a problem—African languages are spoken by southern blacks, many varieties of pidgin and Creole forms common to the southern region influence on post-Creole speech: “Black men and women tend to say “I come *for get* my coat,” “Can we *stay to* the table,” and pronounce “ask as *axe* “and “*it as ee*” (Coates, 1998, p. 57-58). These syntactical variations among blacks of the rural south are “innovative for most black speakers in the isolated rural areas” and once they mix with “educated black elite” the speech forms in terms of syntax and grammar tend toward Standard English (Coates, 1998, p. 59; Scott, 1998).

Power, speech and occupation are issues for industrialized nations as Japan, where Japanese women are fighting to use patterns of speech that is team-oriented and want to eliminate “powerless” speech which is the norm. Wetzel (1983), research findings appear in the chapter titled, *Are Powerless Communication Strategies the Japanese Norm?*, which examines the “strikingly parallel claims of Japanese communication and female communication in the West” (Coates, 1998, p. 388). The similarities between Japan and the United States are interesting in terms of the mood of women, there’s overwhelming favor for using non-feminized forms of speech—no more male-talk and female-talk in the workplace. Wetzel’s research indicates the following (summary of Coates, 1998, pp. 389-91):

- Women show greater tendency to make positive statements and minimal “mm hm,”
- Women are more likely than men to make utterances that demand or encourage responses from their fellow speakers,
- Features of women’s speech include “positive reactions” and agreeing, words of solidarity,
- Women are more likely to adopt a strategy of silent protest after they have been interrupted.

Interestingly, these features also characterize the speech of women in Western societies (see Wardhaugh, chapter 13); indicating the connection between Japanese-Western styles of language

in communication. Also, there is “miscommunication,” which is culturally determined by rules for interaction: Japanese women must maintain “harmony in human relationships” and speak in the “way of the onna-raisku (Coates, 1998, p. 299). Katsue Reyonld’s research on female speakers of Japanese, claims that miscommunication about using “power language” may mean to speak in an aggressive and adversarial manner (men-talk), which is counterproductive and violates the Japanese politico-cultural norms. In fact, one reason that Japanese women want to “transition” from the onna-raisku style of speech is that “men are superior and women inferior” according to the Confucian Doctrine (Coates, 1998, p. 298). As Japanese and Western women accept positions of leadership, and power—doctors, lawyers, business persons, and politicians—then there’s more opportunity to break not only the proverbial glass ceiling, but the linguistic ceiling as well. The use of words in speech can be powerful. Loyalty is conveyed or wars instigated by what is spoken—recall this month the issue with Israel because Vice President Biden used the wrong words. In my own unscientific study of language and gender for Dr. Popal’s Sociolinguistic Course (spring 2010), ten hours were spent viewing audio/video speeches of three United States Secretary of State noting differences in the Secretaries language variations which may relate to gender or socio-cultural and politico-cultural traditions. Powell, Albright and Rice have audio/video presentations available at C-SPAN education Library; and, sometimes viewing of current televised shows of Rice in Africa (fundraising), Albright discussing the new book, and Powell in media interviews about the Iran and Iraq issues. In short, my findings noted similarities in articulation among all three speakers; clearly, not one of the Secretaries misused participles (*in* for *ing*), negation (*I don’t do nothing*); but, pronouns were used more by Powell. Secretary

Powell often said “*I was Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,*” and “*I wouldn’t say we wanted to control things in Iraq.*” Albright and Rice often used gender-neutral speech to reduce the impact of controversial statements and responses to tough questions: “*We want to,*” “*Our goal is to partner,*” “*This great country of ours.*” The women Secretaries stayed away from combative language; and speeches were often heavy-laden with factual information and peppered with collaborative nouns as “*partnering, our partners, friends, neighboring partners.*” Upon reading the biographies of Condoleezza and Madeleine, we find that both have doctorates from top-universities and served as professors at Georgetown (Albright) and Stanford (Rice) prior to becoming public servants. Fasfold (1990) refers to “*discourse grammar,*” all the speakers managed the *silence, overlap* and *single-speaker talk* during public addresses that often required participation in question/answer sessions; essentially, the Secretaries refrained from rude interruptions and “*excessive talk*” to allow others time to participate (p. 75). The occupational class requirements have been met by these political women leaders and there seems to be very little variation in language determined by gender. What about weakness and emotional display (non-verbal communication) by politicians? One media writer states:

“While a man who cries is a human being, a woman who cries is a woman. By crying she loses her humanity only to become gendered and ‘particular’ again. ‘This means that the public disclosure of emotion by men and women does not necessarily carry the same symbolic value: while for men in power tears may be a sign of sensibility and strength, for women they still may be a sign of weakness. For instance, in coverage of the murder of Swedish foreign minister Anna Lindh in Finnish newspapers male politicians (mainly prime minister Göran Persson) are always described as ‘moved’, ‘shocked’ or ‘struggling to hold back tears’ but never crying. Women, on the contrary, cannot hold back.” (Portraying Politics, 2006, page 4).

Crying sounds were not present in the speeches by the United States Secretaries. The reader cannot confuse the speeches with the presence or absence of gender-specificity—speech writers are paid well to minimize language variations imposed by gender (and race for that matter). The notion that conventions of politico-administration institutions and predominantly male-dominated government positions result in language oppression and the unequal status of women is not correlated in research.

The literature review indicates little empirical research from the field of public administration specifically about language oppression and women; however, the structural exclusion of women that results in inequality is not solely related to language and political constructs. We are cautioned to distinguish between language oppression—use of oppressive language—and bureaucratic and political institutions that exist which may serve to maintain the privilege of males. The language planning process is a central part to nation-building and involves public administration; bureaucratic agencies make implementation effective (or ineffective) and efficient (or costly) if the basics of nationalism, human rights and language rights, are not satisfied (Wardhaugh, 2009, pp. 378-379). The literature review impressed upon me the real importance of understanding the language function in society; and, addressing the rights of the minority (or inferior) groups, namely women. The situation in Muslim nations is difficult; religious and politico-cultural practices maintain systems that are harmful females (girls, women). In public administration, the Structural Contingency Theory, School of Classical Management (popular in the fifties and sixties), uses an environmental model to analyze

organizations; the organizational structure which includes management, technology, decision-making, mission and values, and the human components are examined for effectiveness.

Bureaucratic institutions that maintain oppressive systems—women are unequal in position, pay—are supposed to apply contingencies for change and undergo structural growth (Clegg, et.al., 1996, pp. 58-63). Organizational dynamics and development is a field of interest; unfortunately, the intersection of language, oppression and gender did not surface in the literature review.

The literature review did expose the linguistic relationship of the Nazi era and maltreatment of the Jews (including women); some believe that language was a powerful tool in furthering the Nazi agenda (Hutton, 1998). Linguistics and race theory are related in empirical studies (see critical race theory, Laddson-Billings, 2009), and “the worlds languages are now the worlds ethnic groups” is quite telling (Hutton, 1998, p. 3). Some suggest there’s a powerful link between the world-view, the New World Order, and linguistics, a mother-tongue, perhaps English. “Whitney recognizes that ‘speech is to man what his song is to the bird,’ and when immigrants come to America they must adopt American English to survive other than in their small communities (Hutton, 1998, p. 269). Language mixing is occurring—some speak Spanglish, a mix of English and Spanish, which is an example of the power of speech language. Moreover, Asgharzadeh (2007) offers the Islamic view of the role of language and the democratic—equality for women—struggles in Iran. Iran language use and oppression issues are related to religion and the various socio-cultural, economic and politico-cultural and educational dimensions that have a psychological effect on the woman’s view of reality: “Oppressive

linguistic and education policies” show how the government uses “military force to suppress other languages” related to power (p. 5). The Persian language is the “superior Tongue” that is associated with privilege (Asgharzadeh, 2007, p. 5). At the United Nations, the Arabs in Iran wanted the oppression and ill-treatment of national linguistic minority groups to end; and have their cultural and linguistic rights (Asgharzadeh, 2007, p. 21). The debate on this topic will not be covered in this paper; however, universal reality is that languages such as the Anglo-American ones figure prominently in Global Village and impact indigenous peoples religion, ethnic, national languages and socio-cultural and political systems as well (Hutton, 1998, pp. 2-13).

Language Oppression, Women and Education

How can we benefit from education? This question is really an expectation of the benefits of educational systems. The role of education to end oppressive language and unequal status of women is maintained by systems based on socio-cultural, economic or political, and administration conventions should begin with learning about the topic, dialogue and collaboration. The literature review offers little research to support a casual relationship of language and oppression of women. However, there’s some support for the use of oppressive language and psychological influence on a woman’s view of her place in the world-- language and violence/victimization (Morash,2006); and, language and gender-role offerings and gender power dominance issues to understand individual’s experiences by examining their conversational interactions (Tannen,1994, pp. 20-22). Linguistic oppression of women is worldwide and the plurality of nations and cultures intermixing ideas does require education profession investigate the topic. Cudd (2006) writes that oppression is fundamental to socio-

political institutions; and, we've learned that bureaucracies are slow to change. Explaining, or education and training, on the

phenomena of oppressive language and effect on women; and, language use and gender-role maintenance that keeps women in an unequal status, is a rational beginning to change. Research did offer some suggestions to implement in a college/university or lecture-based setting to help groups of students/adult learners understand the conversational interactions and gender-relationships (Cameron, 1984; Tannen, 2006; Cudd, 2006). Educational systems can teach about the following: the “harm condition” that is an outcome of institutional practices harmful to women, the “social condition,” or oppressiveness from groups, and “privilege conditions,” which the superior group (male) benefits from the socio-cultural, politico-administration institutional arrangements (Cudd, 2006, p. 25). These basics begin the thinking about harmful use of language—in particular the use of oppressive language use strongly connected to violence against women. Disney (2008) suggests that for women in developing countries as Mozambique and Nicaragua, political participation and legal reforms are required to “attack patriarchy” (P. 115). Educational systems are challenged with cultural and lingual plurality—and language planning has, to date, focused on standardizing the language as one approach nation-building (Wardhaugh, 2009, Fasold, 1990; Language Planning Videos). The questions about “language diversity” in the twenty-first century and effects on globalization are not settled (Tonkin, et. al., 2003). Even Cameron (1984), *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, says that education about language and women oppression does not cure/prevent women inequality; the research on linguistic determinism argued by Gradoll, Kristeva, and Daly, is challenged by Tannen and Cameron. Still,

Cameron recognizes:

"Sexist language teaches us what those who use it and disseminate it think women's place ought to be: second-class citizens, neither seen nor heard, eternal sex-objects and personifications of evil.[sic] violent speaking and writing and to violent-centric language...[S]he notes, 'A whole vocabulary exists denigrating the talk of women who do not conform to male ideas of femininity: nag, bitch, strident. More terms trivialise interaction between women: girls' talk, gossip, chitchat, mothers' meeting'" (O'Toole, 1997, p. 468)

The challenge of deciding how should developing societies exist and embrace values of women equality and human rights as outlined in the UN Millennium Development Goals, and that don't remove all their customs and traditions, underlies the questions presented in this paper.

The literature review of articles by scholars on the language (English) and globalization topic does provide a context for the discussion of language use and women inequality and some possible government solutions (Ives, 2010; Tonkin, 2003). Garcia, et. al. (2006), suggest ways for incorporating multilingualism in schools and developing language rights and liberties and full human development—i.e. when students see positive texts, media that are representative of diverse cultural groups and language speakers there's greater change of a positive effect on behavior and language use complimentary to women (pp. 3-9). The literature review was useful in terms of distinguishing the variables: language oppression and oppressive language, at least in the research context, are different; and, the differences lead to very different outcomes and implications for learning.

Methodology

This paper explored the language and gender topic by culling information from archival data—journal, book and blog reports on the topic. The research subjects are women. How and why do women become victims and subjects of interests in research on language and gender and oppression? The sample (subjects) is significant and must satisfy the scientific method for developing a research design. The literature review indicates that methodologies using females (women, girls) is not uncommon and certainly not new. There are gender-specific topics in research and the intersectional subjects of language and women from feminist's studies, social and psychological sciences as well as political and public administration, provide knowledge by comparing women and girl experiences with conversational interactions or social use of language and variations. Target female populations were indicated in each of the articles cited in this essay; and, the demographics of the subjects were also clearly identified to satisfy the scientific standards of validity and reliability in the research studies. It is important to note that the linguists make technical distinctions in vocabulary words as gender and sex, so that they can conduct research that tests their hypothesis. Some linguistics interests are in Gender-variations of language in society (home, work, school) and others want to expand the knowledge base regarding sexuality and language (Coates, 1998; Wardhaugh, 2010, Portrayal Politics.net website, 2006).

Interestingly, boys/girl subjects are used in the early research by Dr. Tannen, whose findings indicate gender roles are learned by boys/girls through “talk;” and vocabulary is used to

support the social status of boys/girls (“He said, She Said,” 2009). The reader should understand that the source documents for this report are peer-reviewed; and, information from respected and competent researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics as Labov, Wardhaugh, and contributors to the *Language and Gender Reader* edited by Coates (1998). There is also a distinction between the variables language oppression, and oppressive language which describes the extent of abusive language and violence against women (Spender, 1980; Disney, 2006; O’Toole, 1997; Cudd, 2006). The research on language and gender-specificity was evident regarding Japanese and Chinese cultures, and Middle-Eastern cultures examining the experiences of women and language based on socio-cultural and politico-administration traditions (Iran, Mozambique, Nazi Germany). Overwhelming in use in the field of language and gender research is the qualitative method known as ethnography. Linguists use male/female adults from non-Western societies to learn of language variations associated with gender-exclusivity (Yanyuwa tribe); and, adult subjects are used in ethnographic research to examine the influence of class, race and culture on language in various societies. Yaeger-Dror (1998), states that using ethnography to collect data to reveal the language and gender connection, is not without confusion induced by the Observer’s Paradox identified by Labov (1972). This Paradox is the tendency for the participant-observers to influence the speech patterns of the subjects; even the “interviewees’ speech habits and reports of habits can be influenced by the outsider” (Yaeger-Dror, 1998, p. 72).

Ethnographers use the direct method (observation) to collect data regarding the use of language by women in occupations of “power” in positions such as lawyers, doctors and politicians. The instrumentation used by ethnographers fond of the qualitative research method is the questionnaire and/or survey—interviewing subjects; note-taking or audio/video recordings help capture particulars of the speech event. This paper did not use a direct method to collect data about language/gender and occupation—i.e. subjects were not randomly selected, interviewed or directly observed; there is no original research. This paper merely explores the topic for a deeper understanding of the subject matter and identification of the conceptual framework on language, oppression and women for future field research. The objectivity used to select articles was, hopefully, free of personal bias; the reader should note that the scaffolding process was used to identify worthwhile references from other courses taken in the IME program.

Results/Findings

The literature review makes reference to the power and oppression issues related to language in writings of Anglo versus French feminists scholars as Dale Spender, Julia Kristeva, (Cameron, 1985, pp. 115-128) and Deborah Tannen and Deborah Cameron; and, provide the empirical support linking feminism and linguistic theory, intersectional research and notions of power and dominance as well as existence of “women’s language” and the monopolistic view of linguistic determinism are key findings shared in this paper. There are opponents to notions of linguistic determinism as Cameron. As indicated in the literature review, the Radical, Marxist and Structural Contingency theories, offer the conceptual framework to examine topics related to language, oppression and women; however, empirical evidence of oppressive language as related

to violence is most prevalent; whereas there's scant research support for language as a cause of oppression. The research on the topic of language, oppression and gender indicates a some truths:

1) Gender-exclusivity does exist in language; 2) Gender-variations can exist and related to a range of factors as class, race, and gender, 3) Language variations are minimal in occupations of power and prestige such as doctors and politicians; who want to achieve acceptable standards-of spoken English; 4) Studies with females (women) subjects, intersectional studies regarding language and gender, have growing interests; 5) Politics-administration forms exist to maintain institutional systems of language use relates to oppression and women inequality; and, 6) *Sociolinguistic Universal Tendencies* regarding testable claims. There's overwhelming support of language variations among men and women when they "talk" to each other, or speak engage in cross-gender (men-women talk) conversations. For example, men tend to refer to women as "babe/baby, broad/cupcake" when flirting and women, even some feminist want to be called "mother/mum" (Gray, 2004; Coates, 1998; Wardhaugh, 2010). Sociolinguists recognize that in some societies phonological, morphological and syntactic or lexical contrasts determine by gender of speakers. For example, the socio-cultural practice of gender-exclusivity where children are raised to speak "women dialect" and "men dialect" occurs as in the Yanyuwa tribe, the violence language associated with women victims of abuse and sexual violence; and, the feasibility of language use associated with education and experience as is the case of female political leaders. Gender-variations in speech are considered in the following (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 342):

- Women and men develop different patterns of language use,
- Women tend to focus on affective functions of interaction more than men,
- Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more than men,
- Women tend to interact in ways which maintain and increase solidarity (especially in formal context),
- Women are stylistically more flexible than men

These tendencies in use of language for men/women are universal; and, testing such claims gives a better understanding of "gender speech." Finally, the "meaning" of terms as oppressive

language, language use and oppression, are distinguishable in the linguistic research agenda to illuminate factors related to a framework. I had envisaged language as a means of women's oppression, but research findings do not support this idea.

Educational Implications

The information on language, oppression and gender strives to examine topics related to sexism and stereotypes that are part of modern society. Feminism has pushed for the elimination of gender discrimination, and want to begin with modernizing language forms. Nicole Kidman, Barbara Streisand and Whoopi were first to identify themselves as “actor” and not “actress.” Today, we hear/read nouns that are gender-neutral such as *babysitter*, *politician*, *sales person*, *care giver*; however, the pronouns he/she are still in wide use. Educators will want to teach what is acceptable by modern standards. The shift in social norms resulted in *Slang Dictionary*, and the increasing popularity of the gender-neutral television show *Sex and the City*. The research on the function of language in society and universal tendencies in speech for men/women as well as language that relates to occupational class, are important topics that in research studies. Moreover, Radical and Marxist theories help conceptualize the language, oppression and gender issue, and that “as recalled by Simone de Beauvoir leads to linguistic determinism (Cameron, 1985, p. 139). In contrast, the deterministic view that language causes women's oppressions and inequality, is disputed by some scholars, the research findings do respond to some of the questions mentioned earlier in the essay. The knowledge of gender speech communication, conversational interactions, helps shape the way students of sociolinguistics and the social sciences think about the typical speech patterns of women and men. Hopefully, students and

adult learners taking college courses as folk linguistics, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and feminists studies and education courses with emphasis on “demystifying” the appropriate role of women in society and use of language, will aid them to make important decisions about speech that can help them succeed (or fail) in a career? It’s important to recognize that “The media, represents not only a potential cure for gender inequality in society and politics but also a source of this gender “sickness” (Portraying Politics.net, p. 1) As women gain in political positions and in roles as decision makers, they will have an effect on the language planning and nation-building process.

Conclusion

The research in the area of language and gender indicates that linguistic variations are related to power, oppression, occupation, and gender related to socio-cultural, economic, politics-administration factors. Today, the push for gender-neutrality means we must change words or avoid using gender-specific vocabulary altogether. Even attitudes must change: “Gender portrayal has changed - but not enough...*What if she is supposed to push the button to fire the missiles and can't because she's just done her nails?* (PotrayalPolitics, 2006, p. 6). A change in language is slow; and according to Wardhaugh, perhaps, women/men will have to endure societal construction of gender-roles supported by language for a little while longer. The examination of linguistic oppression and the “meaning” to men, and the historical patriarchy system has social and political, and bureaucratic implications. This paper did not expand on the Muslim nations and how religion influences language and system-maintenance leads to women inequality.

As one scholar states:

“Language, though the socially produced means of thought, is not socially controlled. Increasingly control over the development of language and its use is held by state institutions, including mass-media and monopolistic private enterprise as in journalism and advertising...” (Cameron, 1985, p. 145).

Nana, perhaps, could not imagine the power of language-- to describe our thoughts, our past and future and who we are in our glory and ineptness as well as empowerment and oppression. The process of exploring the topic language, oppression and women, has intensified my interests in just how much language reveals our humanity. The more we learn about language and control mechanisms as governments, businesses and nonprofits (foundations), perhaps, then the we'll have political participation and legal reforms to benefit females (women and girls) and erase sexual violence and exploitation especially rituals tied to religious, socio-cultural traditions.

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